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OVERVIEW OF CMHC ACTIVITIES RELATED TO URBAN SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION

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CMHC MISSION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Canada's housing agency, is a federal crown corporation responsible for administering the National Housing Act. This legislation establishes CMHC's mandate "to promote the construction of new houses, the repair and modernization of existing houses, and the improvement of housing and living conditions".

Within this mandate CMHC has been involved in a wide variety of activities ranging from public land assembly, the funding and development of public and social housing projects, neighbourhood revitalization, research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields and the development of advisory documents for consumers and the development industry. Given this direct involvement, CMHC is interested in how housing and urban environments relate, either positively or negatively to urban safety and crime prevention.

Cities have become increasingly complex systems involving many actors who often lack common goals. CMHC is taking steps to widen its perspective on housing to include a greater concern for the various connections between housing and urban development. The Corporation wants to achieve better harmonization between the pursuit of federal housing objectives and other public and private actions to ensure that housing plays a role in promoting urban environments that are safer and better places to live.

INTRODUCTION:

Over the years CMHC has undertaken, and continues to carry out a number of activities which relate to, and in some cases influence, urban safety and crime prevention. The purpose of this overview is to briefly describe some of these activities. The overview is organized in three sections:

- o CMHC Programs including the delivery of public housing, social housing and housing rehabilitation programs.
- o Research activities including the development of advisory documents on target hardening and testing of products designed to impede crime.
- o Special initiatives such as public housing regeneration, the development of new neighbourhoods and the delivery of emergency shelters for victims of family violence.

1. CMHC PROGRAMS

As part of the Corporation's responsibility to ensure that all Canadians have access to decent, safe and affordable housing CMHC has, since its inception in 1946, delivered a number of programs. The National Housing Act, as amended from time to time, provides the authority for CMHC to provide technical as well as financial assistance to a range of recipients, including Public Housing Authorities, Non-Profit Societies and Co-operatives as well as individual households meeting certain eligibility criteria. The Act also includes the provision to undertake joint initiatives with provinces under which operating losses/subsidies are shared.

Much of the assisted housing provided from the late 1950's through the early 1970's was within the auspices of these federal-provincial arrangements. The housing produced was publicly owned and operated by the partnership, generally with the provincial partner or delegated Public Housing Authority responsible for the day to day management. As a result of its public ownership, this older assisted stock, of which there are some 205,000 units in Canada, is generally referred to as Public Housing.

The Public Housing program is no longer used to develop new supply although a large portfolio is still under management. As a result of the larger scale of many of the projects developed through the Public Housing Program and the concentration of lower income households, social and crime related problems have been experienced in some of these projects. Problems related to drugs and crime such as "crack" drug dealers in public housing units in Toronto have recently received wide press coverage. CMHC, together with provincial housing agencies have, and continue to take steps to address these problems. As an example, two special initiatives to regenerate problem projects are described later in this overview.

During the 1970's social housing programs evolved to address some of the criticisms and problems which arose in the large scale public housing

projects housing concentrations of low income households. The principal distinction between the non-profit and co-operative programs and the earlier public housing was the private development and operation of the projects by non-profit organizations, including co-operatives, and the generally smaller scale socially integrated designs.

In addition to providing subsidies to the Non-Profit groups to operate these projects, CMHC provided technical assistance in project development. Design reviews were undertaken to assess site planning, including the proposed privacy and security aspects of the project. A 1983 evaluation of this program observed that the smaller scale, community based projects developed under this program generally enhanced social interaction in the projects and also facilitated greater resident familiarity, thereby contributing to increased security.

The Corporation also provides assistance for the rehabilitation of homes, including both owner occupied and rental units, through the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program. Assistance involves the provision of technical assistance to determine repair needs and hire a contractor as well as the provision of a grant/loan. By focusing on rehabilitating the older stock, the RRAP program does not disrupt or destroy the neighbourhood fabric or the social networks within a close interactive community. While it is difficult to substantiate the degree to which this type of initiative enhances community cohesion thereby helping to create a safer environment in the context of crime prevention, the program certainly increased the structural safety and adequacy of the existing dwellings.

Social Housing programs, including non-profit and residential rehabilitation continue to be delivered throughout Canada although a major review of federal housing policy in 1985 resulted in some refocusing of the programs. Since 1986 the provinces have taken a more active delivery role than during the 1973-85 period. Subsidies are once again cost shared between the federal and provincial governments and the programs focus on targeting assistance to needy households and integrating small scale projects into the community.

In order to ensure the continuing relevance and effectiveness of the programs delivered by the Corporation all programs are evaluated on a cyclical basis. For example the Non-Profit and Co-operative Housing Program was evaluated in 1983, the RRAP Program in 1985 and an evaluation of the existing public housing portfolio is currently nearing completion. The results of the evaluation will be input into a public consultation process, to be initiated by CMHC later this year. Among other things, this will examine ways in which crime and related problems within the portfolio can be addressed.

2. RESEARCH

Under the National Housing Act the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields and to undertake the publishing and distribution

of the results of this research. In addition to internal research CMHC also sponsors external research. Over time, CMHC has produced a number of research papers relating to crime prevention and security. Included within this research mandate the Corporation has undertaken product testing of devices and systems related to security in residential buildings.

Research initiatives of note have included a 1982 study on The Environmental Design and Management (EDM) Approach to Crime Prevention in Residential Environments. Prepared for the Solicitor General and CMHC, this research examined the effectiveness of various approaches to crime prevention. The study concluded that no one approach can be effective but that a comprehensive strategy involving both design (the built environment) and management (the social environment) must be developed on a case by case basis.

A more recent research project involves an evaluation and testing of emergency response systems (ERS) for the elderly. Emergency response systems are devices that ensure timely and appropriate assistance arrives from family, friends, neighbours or professional help when a person is in an emergency. These devices can help older or disabled people to live independently in their homes. While not intended to address crime, ERS can be used to call for help in the event of an attempted break-in. More important though, in considering urban safety in its broader context, ERS, together with a network of community services, contribute to creating a safer environment and enhancing the quality of life for individuals who might otherwise be confined to institutions.

CMHC product testing covers an extensive range of building systems and devices. In the area of crime prevention, testing has included the evaluation of various door and door frame assemblies for resistance to forced entry. A similar set of tests were carried out on window guards, windows and horizontal sliding door assemblies. In 1988 a report was completed on residential intrusion alarms. This report discusses the theory and practice of electronic burglary protection, including a description of the equipment available and how it works.

A complete listing of CMHC sponsored research and product testing is presented in the Bibliography on Crime Prevention and Urban Safety in Residential Environments, CMHC;1989

3. SPECIAL INITIATIVES

Over and above the ongoing program related activities for which CMHC is responsible, the Corporation also undertakes special initiatives. A number of these relate to creating safer and more liveable environments. This section overviews some of these special initiatives: the first two describe the regeneration of two public housing projects; the latter describe CMHC's involvement in the improvement of existing neighbourhoods as well as the creation of a number of new inner city neighbourhoods, and the federal government's initiative to assist victims of family violence.

Uniacke Square, Halifax Nova Scotia

In 1986, in order to expand its knowledge of the problems associated with the renewal of aging projects, CMHC undertook a pilot project to examine the viability of regeneration. Uniacke Square, a 183 unit project built between 1962 and 1966 in Halifax, Nova Scotia was selected due to its evident deteriorated condition and its location in an inner city area targeted for improvement by the municipal and provincial governments.

A survey of user perceptions found safety and security to be a prime concern of the residents. The following physical changes are being made to the project in response to this concern;

- many of the pedestrian routes through the project have been eliminated to create a series of cul-de-sacs or courtyards.

- an open gallery which provided access to upper units in a stacked, row house building has been eliminated. All units now have private entrances at grade.

- letter slots have been replaced to prevent unlocking of unit entrances.

In addition to these physical changes, workshops on tenant empowerment have been sponsored and a community development worker hired to work with the residents. This worker has since initiated an anti-drug program sponsored by other government departments. Improved space for a Parent Resource Centre and the Tenant Association have facilitated community activities. Examples of such activities include tenant management workshops, leadership training workshops, drug awareness programs and various arts crafts and social activities.

The planning process has been open and consultative with a tenant representative sitting on the steering committee. It is hoped that this approach, along with the exploitation of employment and enterprise opportunities for residents will contribute to a healthier community.

Regent Court, Regina, Saskatchewan

Regent Court is a Federal/Provincial public housing project built in 1959, containing 109 dwelling units in low rise structures. The project was laid out in a courtyard design, enclosing large open green spaces with no delineation of space for private use and no recreational facilities. By 1980, the units remained structurally sound but in need of modernization and upgrade. The site was barren and unused and vandalism was prevalent. The tenants were predominantly single parent families and the project experienced a 40% turnover annually. The ten senior citizen households in Regent Court were afraid to venture out after dark. Two out three applicants refused accommodation at Regent Court when it was offered, despite a shortage of public housing in the area. Tenants did not feel part of the surrounding community and isolated themselves.

In addition to maintaining project standards and preventing future deterioration, regeneration was intended to improve the housing environment, encourage tenant responsibility and pride of property, improve social and recreational facilities and programs and to provide space for public and private use.

A major upgrade of Regent Court dwellings and site occurred in 1983 at a cost of $25,000 per unit. The project, now named Regency Gardens, has undergone a transition from a "problem" project to a smoothly running community, desirable to tenants. Vandalism is currently minor (perhaps $100 per month for the occasional window broken by younger children). The on-site janitor is able to deal with any vandals on his own. Minor tenant abuse was evident in less than 10% of the units inspected early in 1989.

Other crimes, such as drug and alcohol abuse, are similar in frequency to comparable Regina neighbourhoods. There have been a few incidents of break-ins to units which back onto a storm drainage channel and large open space; lighting will be increased to these areas. The Regina Housing Authority no longer receives complaints from the surrounding community.

Tenants must take care of their private rear yards and most reportedly do so. Funds allocated for tenant relations have been used for such activities as fire and crime prevention workshops and personal counselling. Tenant views on safety, crime and their satisfaction with upgraded features will be explored in a survey to be undertaken in the fall of 1989.

Creating New Residential Neighbourhoods

CMHC has participated in a number of major inner city redevelopments including False Creek South (44 acres, Vancouver), the St Lawrence Neighbourhood (80.5 acres, Toronto) and Lebreton Flats (Ottawa). Each of these, commencing in the early 1970's involved the transition of older under-utilized inner city industrial sites into medium to high density residential neighbourhoods.

In each case the objectives of the redevelopment included the creation of socially mixed neighbourhoods, with a relatively high proportion of assisted housing. This represented a notable departure from the large scale public housing projects of the 1960's. The emphasis was on creating neighbourhoods rather than simply projects. The neighbourhoods were planned to facilitate a mix of residents with various incomes, different housing tenure, family and non family households as well as a mix of land use - incorporating residential, commercial and recreational/park facilities.

The role of CMHC varied in each of these three cases but generally encompassed assistance in the form of land assembly loans, the funding of the social housing programs requisite to the inclusion of affordable housing and, in the case of Lebreton Flats, joint responsibility for the development.

While the explicit objectives in each case were not directed at crime prevention they did nonetheless incorporate the implicit intent to create vibrant and safe communities. Concepts such as privacy, clear demarcation of public and private space and resident identity were integral to the planning of each of these redevelopments. Hardware and construction materials which increase the difficulty of illegal entry, as well as crime detection devices such as monitors and alarms were included in the project designs. A high level of resident participation in the development process

also led to increased social cohesion, thereby enhancing collective identity and security.

A qualitative evaluation of these redevelopments, specifically examining the relative safety and level of crime has not yet been undertaken with the exception of a resident evaluation of LeBreton Flats. This evaluation assessed levels of satisfaction with safety of the neighbourhood from crime (85% residents satisfied), safety and security of the unit (82% satisfied) and sense of privacy (92%).

In each case these neighbourhoods are considered to be highly successful in demonstrating that large scale medium to high density redevelopment with a high proportion of assisted housing can be successfully implemented.

Neighbourhood Improvement

The Neighbourhood Improvement Program, introduced in 1974, was designed to encourage and support the efforts of municipalities and neighbourhood residents to improve the physical environment of areas that are in a state of decline. Its emphasis was on the conservation and rehabilitation of existing neighbourhoods and the provision of amenities in these communities (such as parks, community centres and improved street lighting). Residents participated in the planning and implementation of neighbourhood improvement activities. One legacy of this program is in Winnipeg where the the program stimulated city police to participate - and the community based policing initiated during that program remains in effect today.

Project Haven

In 1988 the Government of Canada announced a special initiative to address both the root causes and the effects of family violence. As part of this commitment to assist victims of family violence, the Corporation was asked to deliver, on behalf of Health and Welfare Canada, up to 500 hostel rooms across the country for battered women and their children. Through CMHC the federal government is providing capital and technical assistance to develop these emergency shelters.

Prior to this special initiative it was estimated that there were about 3,300 beds/units in emergency shelters specifically intended for victims of family violence. These, in turn are estimated to serve an estimated 60,000 women and children each year. Many have been developed with assistance from CMHC and most receive operating assistance through provincial social service agencies, cost shared by the federal government under the Canada Assistance Plan.

In delivering this program CMHC field offices provide technical advice to non-profit sponsor groups, including guidelines on project design, particularly the security aspect critical to a project of this type.